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PRESS RELEASE

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Senator Anne Gobi Announces Important FY16 Budget Initiatives

BOSTON - **Senator Anne M. Gobi (D-Spencer)** and her colleagues in the Senate and counterparts in the House of Representatives have delivered to Governor Baker a \$38.1 billion dollar budget for the Fiscal Year 2016. The spending bill emphasizes economic growth, support for residents most in need, and reform of the state's transportation system, while also making investments in local aid, education, and human services including an acute focus on substance abuse.

"The budget, besides providing a financial roadmap, contains a number of new initiatives to help our economy and to provide resources to assist our families and those in need," said Senator Gobi.

This budget enhances the Commonwealth's commitment to local aid through numerous funding streams including almost \$980 million to Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA), a \$34 million increase from FY15 and \$4.5 billion for Chapter 70 (education funding). The spending plan fully funds Special Education Circuit Breaker in order to help districts meet the cost of educating students with disabilities. The budget also provides \$59 million to reimburse municipalities for Regional School Transportation costs, funding Senator Gobi championed in her maiden speech during Senate debate.

Education

This budget made education a top priority, especially in the way of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM). The bill creates a 20-30 member STEM advisory council tasked with advising the governor and assisting in informing the work of the secretaries of education, labor and workforce development, and housing and economic development, on issues relating to STEM education and STEM careers. The council will consult with participants and parties from the public and private sectors involved with STEM planning and programming and assess how to increase student interest in careers in STEM.

To keep Massachusetts students competitive in the technology sector, the FY16 budget directs the MA Tech Collaborative to establish and promote computer science education in public schools in conjunction with the Massachusetts Computing Attainment Network (MassCAN). The goal of the group will be to implement a broad-based education and workforce strategy with the objective of increasing the number of students prepared to pursue computing technology careers.

Opioid Epidemic

Citizens of the Commonwealth have become all too familiar with the dangers and consequences of drug abuse in recent years. Massachusetts reported more than 1,000 fatal overdoses in 2014 alone. Naloxone, however, has saved hundreds of lives during that time period and has emerged as an important tool in the fight against the opioid epidemic. The legislature made providing affordable access to the life-saving medication another of its top priorities. \$2.5 million is included in the spending bill to expand patient access to Vivitrol, a non-narcotic drug that blocks the effect of opiates or alcohol for a period of 30 days. Also created in the budget is a Municipal Naloxone Bulk Purchase Trust Fund to be administered by the Commissioner of Public Health. Municipalities may join the program to purchase naloxone for municipal first responder agencies. The state office of pharmacy services will assist with the purchasing and distribution of naloxone on behalf of the program and DPH will assist with training and registration requirements for municipalities.

“Opioids and the destruction caused from abuse is being felt in every community,” said Senator Gobi. “I am hopeful that positive changes will come.”

Prevention of drug abuse and recovery efforts still remain the number one priority in dealing with the opioid epidemic. The FY16 budget includes \$1.5 million to expand opioid prevention grants, \$3.1 million for Recovery High Schools (high schools specifically designed for students recovering from a substance use disorder), over \$375 million for Adult Community Mental Health Services, \$87 million for Child and Adolescent Mental Health services and \$4 million for the Department of Mental Health to annualize and expand community placements to free up beds in the DMH pipeline.

The budget also directs to Department of Public Health to create an extended-release injectable naltrexone pilot program for individuals with opioid or alcohol addiction being treated in licensed clinical stabilization service programs. They will also coordinate discharge planning by connecting patients with community providers prescribing extended-release injectable naltrexone and offering substance abuse counseling. DPH will collect data on the success of the program and determine whether the program could be implemented statewide. There will also be established a task force to study the feasibility of a state or privately operated prescription drug disposal program. The task force will investigate alternative options for scheduled prescription drug collection and safe disposal based on successful programs in other New England states and the drugs stewardship programs in Alameda County, California and Kings County, Washington.

Ovarian Cancer

A woman's risk of getting ovarian cancer during her lifetime is about 1 in 75. To help lessen this rate, the legislature established a special commission tasked with studying the prevalence of ovarian cancer in Massachusetts and to collect statistics relative to the timing of diagnosis and risk factors associated with ovarian cancer. The commission will determine how best to effectuate an early diagnosis and treatment for patients, determine any unmet needs of persons with cancer and those of their families and provide recommendations for additional legislations, support programs and resources necessary.

Economic Development

Building on a responsible yet proactive approach to bolstering the state's economy, this year's budget increases the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) while maintaining a voter-mandated tax reduction and without implementing new taxes or fees. For low-to-moderate households, EITC will increase to 23 percent on January 1, 2016. Increasing this credit is an effective way to fight stagnant wages and lift working families out of poverty.

The legislature created a rural policy advisory commission to enhance the economic vitality of rural communities, defined as municipalities with population densities of less than 500 persons per square mile. They will study, review and report on the status of rural communities and residents in the commonwealth, advise the general court and the executive branch of the impact of existing proposed state laws, policies and regulations on rural communities, advance legislative and policy solutions that address rural needs, advocate to ensure that rural communities receive a fair share of state investment, promote collaboration among rural communities to improve efficiency in delivery of services and develop and support new leadership in rural communities.

"As the co-chair of the Rural Caucus I am especially glad to see new programs geared to assist our rural economies as well as targeted investments for economic stimulation," said Senator Gobi.

This year's spending bill also creates an Economic Empowerment Trust Fund to encourage and facilitate economic empowerment programs. This includes financial literacy programs, college savings accounts, college and career readiness programs, particularly STEM, and programs that support and promote wage equality.

Although the Commonwealth is years removed from the Great Recession, many workers remain unemployed. This budget establishes a training resources and internship network (TRAIN) grant program for the long-term unemployed. The grant program will provide funds to community colleges to implement training programs for the long-term unemployed focused on the development of skills needed to assist individual in returning to the workplace.

MBTA

The budget takes immediate steps to address systemic management problems at the MBTA by including a series of reform tools including 3-year suspension of the statute governing the procurement of private services at the MBTA. Other initiatives include:

- An MBTA fiscal management and control board within MassDOT that will have the power to implement measures to ensure financial, operational and managerial stability at the MBTA while operating within a unified state transportation network;
- An internal special audit unit within MassDOT to monitor quality, efficiency and integrity of the departments operating and capital programs;
- Streamlined accountability at the MBTA, including providing the Secretary of Transportation authority to appoint a General Manager for the MBTA.

The Secretary of Transportation will also work in collaboration with a disabled rider advocate who advocates on behalf of individuals with disabilities to ensure that the interests of the community are fully understood and considered. The selected disabled rider advocates will be someone who is mobility impaired, has a family member who is mobility impaired, is a caretaker of a person who is mobility impaired or represents an organization that serves the needs of individuals with physical disabilities.

Department of Children and Families

Aimed at keeping our children safe, DCF will conduct fingerprint-based background checks of the state and national criminal history database for all applications to be adoptive or foster parents. Prior to any approval the department will also obtain available sex offender registry information associated with the address of the center, home or facility.

Government Transparency

Each executive office will be required to publish on its website a list of statutes passed in the previous 24 months for which regulations are required and for which regulations have not been adopted. They must also post a statement as to the agency's plan to adopt the regulations which must also be filed with the clerks of the house and senate and the chairs of the joint committee on state administration and regulatory oversight.

Included in the budget is a provision that protects taxpayer dollars from being spent on the 2024 Olympics, which also includes tax incentives, for the Games if they come to Massachusetts. The provision requires Boston 2024 to formally request funding from the Legislature for any specific project and make their case during a formal hearing.

The budget now goes to the Governor, who has the option to veto or amend sections of the bill, or sign it as is.

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